

Asian Studies program

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1 Motivation

I founded the Asian Studies program at the Delaware Military Academy (DMA), which I ran for five years (2013-2018) while teaching Principles of Economics prior to starting my doctoral studies. At DMA, I was given tremendous freedom to build educational programs that I was passionate about and could benefit the students. Having just returned from nearly two months in Kashgar in far west China (as part of a language and cultural exchange I co-led with my wife involving Uyghur, Han Chinese, and American college students), I had a great urge to build a program that centered the stories of underrepresented groups that receive little attention in the United States.

While there is great value for students in learning U.S. history and western civilization, an unintended consequence of this approach is that these students very often have large historical and cultural knowledge gaps when it comes to thinking about East, Central, and South Asia. Founding the Asian Studies program was my modest attempt to remedy this in my circles of influence, and in the process, contribute to the formation of broader worldviews and heightened cultural intelligence among my students as well as in broader school community.

2 Speaker series

One of the fixtures of the Asian Studies program was the guest speaker series. After first spending a few weeks building up students' knowledge and awareness of the historical, economic, and cultural contexts of the different regions in Asia, I'd then invite guest speakers from the region to come share their life stories and professional experience with the students. Visits from these speakers, of which there were nearly a dozen, were among the most powerful experiences I've had in my teaching career. For the students, interacting with each speaker went far not only in building the students' intellectual curiosity for the peoples of the world and their stories, but also contributed to the students' desires to share their own life experiences and insights throughout the learning process. I believe there is great power in shared learning experiences such as these, and for this reason I've invested heavily throughout my career curating opportunities for students to learn from others with lived experiences radically different than their own.

Below is a sample of the speakers (as well as photos from their visits) who came to share their stories at the Asian Studies program.

2.1 Nury Turkel

[Nury Turkel](#), an attorney and chairman of the [Uyghur Human Rights Project \(UHRP\)](#), came to speak at the Asian Studies program in 2016. In recognition of his Uyghur human rights advocacy work, Nury was named to Time Magazine's [100 Most Influential People of 2020](#). In 2021, [Nury was appointed](#) to the role of commissioner on the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom by House Speaker Pelosi. Nury shared his story with the students—which involves being born in a detention center in Kashgar during the Cultural Revolution—along with the triumphs and challenges involved in being engaged in full-time in Uyghur human rights advocacy work.



Pictured above: Nury spoke with the students during his visit about the nature of his Uyghur human rights advocacy work, what it was like growing up in far west China, as well as the CCP's coercive assimilation and forced loyalty strategies waged against the Uyghurs.

2.2 Alim Seytoff

[Alim Seytoff](#), an attorney and Director of Radio Free Asia's [Uyghur Service](#) and the former director of [Uyghur Human Rights Project \(UHRP\)](#), visited the Asian studies program in 2016 and 2017. Alim spoke with the students regarding the plight of the Uyghur people under Chinese rule, as well as the nature of his human rights advocacy work. He shared powerfully regarding his efforts in U.S. District Court to free Uyghur men wrongfully detained at Guantanamo Bay in the aftermath of September 11th.



Pictured above: Alim spoke with the students about the nature of his work advocating for Uyghur human rights, the impact of his work as manager of Radio Free Asia's Uyghur service, and prospects for the Uyghurs in China going forward. Pictured right, we hosted Alim for dinner along with some of the college students who participated in the far west China language and cultural exchange program.

2.3 Professor Liu Lin

[Professor Liu Lin](#), professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida International University, came to speak at the Asian Studies program regarding her criminal justice research, as well as her experience defending the rights of minorities as an attorney in Beijing for seven years. Pictured below

(right), the Asian Studies program went to enjoy some Szechuan cuisine with Professor Liu, learning a great deal about Szechuan culture in the process.



Pictured above: Professor Liu spoke with the students regarding her criminal justice research, as well as her experience defending the rights of minorities as a lawyer in Beijing for seven years.

2.4 Professor Wang Yuanchong

[Professor Wang Yuanchong](#), professor of late imperial and modern Chinese and East Asian history at the University of Delaware, came to speak at the Asian Studies program regarding contemporary Chinese political and economic history, as well as China's relations with neighboring countries through time. A favorite amongst the students for his hilarious stories and a great friend to the Asian Studies program, Professor Wang Yuanchong made three visits to speak at the Asian Studies program from 2015-2017.



Pictured above: Professor Wang Yuanchong of the University of Delaware made repeated visits to the Asian Studies program to speak about Chinese and Korean cultural, political, and economic history.